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IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

By William Henry Chamberlin

There is strong political, economic and social ferment today in Southeast Asia, an area about half as large but with somewhat more than the population of the United States, which was overrun by the Japanese during the months of swift and easy victories which followed Pearl Harbor. In varying forms, and in varying degrees of intensity throughout this area, one can perceive a race between revolution and evolution, between impending famine and inevitably inadequate efforts to provide relief.

Southeast Asia includes the independent kingdom of Siam and the Philippine Commonwealth, where independence is scheduled to go into effect on July fourth of this year. Excluding India, the area includes the British colonial possessions of Malaya and Burma, the vast archipelago of the Netherlands Indies and the French colony of Indo-China, the latter alone considerably larger than France itself.

This section of the globe is one of the world's great storehouses of raw materials. Before the war Malaya and the Netherlands Indies together produced most of the total output of tin and rubber. The area is also, in normal times, a large producer of such important foodstuffs and raw materials as sugar, rice, copra, pepper, spices, teakwood and oil. The resumption of full production in these lands is an important element in world economic rehabilitation.

However, Southeast Asia is faced with formidable political and economic difficulties, even if these seem less insuperable than the road-blocks which hold up effective reconstruction in Europe. Since the end of the war with Japan there has been sporadic fighting in Indonesia and French Indo-China. The Philippines emerged from Japanese occupation greatly impoverished and torn by internal political and social feuds.

The British have more force at their disposal in Malaya and Burma than the Dutch have been able to bring to bear in Indonesia or the French in Indo-China. But important

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constitutional changes have gone into effect or are in prospect in Malaya and Burma.

II

Old-fashioned imperialism is one of the most obvious casualties of the war in the Orient. The only question, in the long run, is whether white supremacy will go down in a welter of chaos and bloodshed or whether there will be an orderly transformation of imperialist relations into those of coöperation on more equal terms.

The war has brought to a head a process of native discontent with the self-appointed carriers of the white man's burden which might otherwise have taken decades to develop. The whole of Southeast Asia was under Japanese rule for more than two years. Japanese armies were still in military control of Malaya, the Netherlands Indies and French Indo-China when Tokyo surrendered.

The significance of Oriental military victory over the colonial forces maintained in this part of the world was not lost on native nationalists. And Japanese Pan-Asiatic propaganda was not without success, even though fear, as well as persuasion, played a considerable part in the creation of the satellite local administrations set up in Japanese-occupied territory.

The Japanese method was to establish a single party as the nucleus of a nominally independent régime in the occupied countries. There was a Kalibapi Party in the Philippines and a Dabama Sinyetha Party in Burma, recognized as an independent state in August, 1943. An Indian nationalist movement under the fugitive Subhas Chandra Bose was fostered in Malaya, where Tamil Indians form one of the three large ethnic groups, the others being Malays and Chinese. There is little doubt that this effort to form an Indian army opposed to British rule was viewed with a good deal of native sympathy. Attempts to try some of the leading participants for treason was one of the factors in recent serious rioting.

Under Japanese wartime control local self-government councils were set up in the Netherlands Indies, Dutch place names were altered into Malayan and the Japanese-supervised radio stations poured out a stream of anti-white and anti-western propaganda. This was all the more effective because in all these countries, except Siam and the

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Philippines, nationalist movements, sometimes under Communist influence, sometimes wholly non-Communist, existed before the war.

III

The circumstances under which the Far Eastern war came to an end were favorable to the development of these nationalist movements. France and the Netherlands were so weakened and bled white that months elapsed before they could send even small token forces to their former colonies. The British, hard pressed in their own Imperial possessions by the rising tide of nationalism, rather reluctantly undertook to maintain a kind of interim "law and order" in Indonesia and Indo-China.

But the British Labor Government was neither willing nor able to restore the pre-war colonial status quo throughout these far-flung territories and its troops have confined themselves mainly to occupying and policing a few key cities and ports. The forces used for these operations are heterogeneous in character and have included Indian and sometimes Japanese contingents.

The Indonesian independence movement has centered in the most populous and developed island of Java, where Sutan Sjahrir for some months has been head of a nationalist cabinet. The situation is more complex than is sometimes represented in this country. Negotiations have alternated with a sporadic fighting which still continues to take lives and retard reconstruction. Sjahrir has not maintained full control over the activities of some of the more fanatical Indonesian nationalists.

The situation has been equally confused in French Indo-China, where a veteran Annamite Communist, Ho Chin Minh, heads an indigenous government, while Chinese troops have moved into the northern part of the country and a motley group of French and miscellaneous British forces have been policing the South. An agreement was recently announced under which a large part of Indo-China would become a self-governing state in a federative union with France. Negotiations between Indonesian nationalist and Dutch representatives, which began under the mediation of the British special envoy, Sir Archibald Clark-Kerr, lately appointed as successor to Lord Halifax as Ambassador in Washington, are reported to be well advanced.

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The British are giving substantial self-government to Burma and have prepared a federal administrative scheme designed to provide more authority for Indian and Chinese elements in Malaya. This racially heterogeneous region, with its mixture of Malayan, Chinese and Indian population and its great port of Singapore, was hitherto run on a mixed system of government. The Governor-General exercised the powers of a benevolent autocrat in large matters of state, while various Malay States outside the Straits Settlements were under the nominal authority of native Sultans, each of whom was provided with a British Resident as "adviser".

IV

After India, Southeast Asia is perhaps the most interesting testing ground for the possibility of replacing obsolete imperialism, with its unpleasant overtone of white racial superiority, by a coöperative system in line with Asia's progress in education and national consciousness. Intransigent, isolationist, native nationalism is not the only nor the most desirable alternative to imperialism.

The present acute famine situation in Far Eastern countries (only Siam apparently has a small rice surplus for the current year) is an example of the kind of crisis that can only be solved with the coöperation of the West in shipping and supplies. Certain problems of collective security must be worked out. The technical aid of Europe and America will be required in many fields.

But if the experiment in peaceful evolution is to succeed, if subversive movements, under direction from Moscow, are to be effectively countered, there must be a sweeping and steady advance in genuine self-government for the colonial peoples of the Orient. The limit to their passive acceptance of alien exploitation is at hand.

During the recent war, the Filipinos, who enjoyed a largely independent government, fought for the Allies, while the colonial subjects of Great Britain, France and the Netherlands accepted the coming of the Japanese with indifference, and sometimes actively supported them. The moral of that political lesson should not be overlooked.

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Not Merely Gossip *A Supplement to* Human Events Vol. III - No. 16

By Frank C. Hanighen April 17, 1946

The first report of General W. Bedell Smith, new American Ambassador to Soviet Russia, is said to include, besides its review of Russian conditions, some observations on Germany. This is quite natural since Ambassador Smith, before going to Moscow, had been concerned with problems of the occupation of Germany. In his report from Moscow, he is said to have laid great emphasis on the necessity of feeding the Germans so as to restore German economy, which he rightly regards as a sine qua non for the stability of Europe.

He is not alone. One of the most important stories of the past week came from Berlin, where a group of American editors and publishers warned that the American people must feed the Germans "if democracy is to compete with communism in Germany" (United Press, April 13). Concurring in this sentiment were, among others, Editor Edward T. Leech of the Pittsburgh Press, Publisher Gardner Cowles of the Des Moines Register-Tribune, Frank Gannett of the Gannett chain and Editor Paul Bellamy of the Cleveland Plain Dealer. The latter declared: "We have to feed the Germans or throw Central Europe into the hands of Communists."

Such statements are news, or should be. Yet this despatch was buried on the 25th page of the New York Times, whose own Vice-President and General Manager, Colonel Julius Ochs Adler, one of the party, was quoted as saying that the "American people need to be aroused over this great problem". Other large Eastern papers completely ignored the story. This slighting of an important story stands in contrast to the wide publicity given a similar editor-publisher junket last year which investigated the atrocities of German concentration camps.

The reaction of these newspaper personalities was obviously inspired by the views of British and American commanders in Germany. Already the latter are complaining that the feeding and upkeep of Germany is hampered by the failure of German economy to function under the Potsdam terms; Germany must have food to enable industrial workers to produce and must export goods in order to import food. This picture was early anticipated by HUMAN EVENTS, on November 1, 1944, and in many subsequent issues. The War Department was warned by one of its research sections, a year ago, of the inevitability of the present situation, in a report on food and economy. The General Staff rebuked the authors of the report and ordered them not to circulate it. In short, the Army, the Administration, the authors of the Potsdam agreement, fully warned in advance, have their responsibility for today's disastrous picture in Central Europe.

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The State Department in its effort to mend fences damaged by its recent anti-Argentine policy is now proposing to hold the Rio de Janeiro Conference (which it had previously twice postponed) in July, and to include Argentina. The Department wants Rio as a preliminary to the Pan-American Conference in Bogotá, Colombia, scheduled for next December. As for Bogotá, thereby hangs a tale. Mr. Byrnes, following Perón's election, was still of two minds about reversing his policy towards Argentina. At that moment, there arrived a note from the Colombian Government -- host of the Pan-American Conference -- intimating that there would be little use in coming together in Bogotá because of Washington's "big stick" attitude towards Buenos Aires. That was the last straw. Failure to hold the Bogotá Conference, it was at once realized, would spell complete breakdown of Pan-American unity; hence the somersault in the State Department, not emphasized by its huge and expensive array of tax-supported publicity experts.

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Although at times during the past year it seemed as if the late President Roosevelt had become the "forgotten man", so little did his name occur in discussions of politics under Truman, the establishment of a "Roosevelt myth" received considerable impetus last week on the first anniversary of his death. As early as June 7, 1945, this column noted the beginnings of this myth-making. But during most of the past year, such activities were principally confined to the Left Wing. The Communists have increasingly come to use Roosevelt's name as a club to lay on the Truman Administration, asserting that Truman has not "cooperated" as readily with the Soviet Union as did the late President. Such Left Wing figures in the Democratic Party -- Secretary Wallace, Senator Pepper, and others -- have uttered similar complaints.

In the anniversary speeches during the past week, Right and Center elements of the Democratic Party likewise sought to appropriate the dead President's name as a symbol of their political courses. While the Left Wing claims that the Roosevelt foreign policy was scuttled by Truman and Byrnes, Anne O'Hare McCormick in the New York Times (April 13) takes a contrary view, saying: "He (Roosevelt) was convinced before he died that a firmer though no less friendly line was indicated in our relations with the Soviet Government. Those who talked to him after Yalta believe that Roosevelt's death delayed rather than hastened the 'toughening' of the American attitude, since if his own feeling had been expressed immediately it would have suggested that his successor was deviating from his policy." Thus there seem to be growing two "myths", instead of one. Both could flourish; such was the rather volatile character of Roosevelt.

Soon after Truman took office, political observers speculated as to whether the new President would seek to obtain reflected glory from the name of his predecessor; or whether, in his own interest, he would try to relegate it to obscurity. It was recalled that Coolidge had stifled a sprouting legend of "martyred Harding" by encouraging those who were seeking to muckrake the Harding régime. Coolidge thereby "built himself up", by contrast, as the leader of an "honest" government. Similarly, it was argued, Truman could raise his own prestige by allowing the Roosevelt régime to be "debunked"; for one thing, by letting Congress thoroughly and honestly expose the facts of the Pearl Harbor scandal.

But Truman was, among other things, too faithful a "party man" to follow this course; and the Pearl Harbor Committee investigation became in effect an attempt to whitewash the Roosevelt Administration. One Democratic Senator was heard to say in the Committee room, "Admiral Kimmel, I have nothing against you; I'm simply trying to protect the name of President Roosevelt". President Truman's speech at the grave of Roosevelt shows that he has definitely decided to keep alive his own version of the "Roosevelt myth".

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The Russian answer to "Musk-Ox" takes the form of a projected expedition, whose mission is the study of weather conditions in the "northwestern part of the Atlantic" -- obviously the Iceland-Greenland-Labrador areas. The expedition, announced on the Moscow radio (March 28), is being prepared by the State Institute of Oceanography, under the direction of "Doctor of Geographic Sciences, Engineer Rear Admiral Professor Zubov". The broadcast says, "This part of the world is interesting because many atmospheric phenomena considerably affecting the climate of Europe and the conditions of navigation along the northern sea route have their origin here". (It requires no stretch of the imagination to forecast the reaction in Moscow if the United States or Canada were to announce a scientific excursion to the northern coast of Siberia.) Two other expeditions are planned by the Institute of Oceanography -- one to the northern part of the Pacific "where lie the most important trade routes and concentrations of fish", and the other to the sub-Antarctic. Additionally, there is a report that the Soviet Union is sending an expedition, composed of experts on animal diseases, to Afghanistan -- that pastoral and strategic State.

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By requesting consideration of the Spanish problem at the UNO meeting (in New York) Russia has taken the initiative away from the Western Powers, whose advocacy of Iran's case had preëmpted the spotlight. The Russian move is attended by considerable propaganda. The charge that Germans are carrying on atomic research in Spain is regarded in diplomatic quarters as completely unfounded. As for the claim that the State Department has definite information supporting that charge, sources in the Government very friendly to the Spanish Republican cause deny it. These sources say that the story was a "plant", having been given to the press by pro-Russian elements in the State Department. The tissue-paper character of the "atomic uproar" appears in the significant reaction of Fernando de los Rios, Spanish Republican leader, who deprecated such talk of atomic research in Spain.

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In the furious outbreak of fighting between the Chinese Reds and the Chinese Nationalists in Manchuria, some of the richest spoils are the Japanese-built branch line railways -- a true rail empire, totalling about 5,000 miles. The two main lines -- South Manchurian Railway (900 miles) and Chinese Eastern Railway (1,300 miles) -- were placed under joint Sino-Russian management by the treaty of last August. But the branch lines do not come under this agreement and presumably they have been occupied by Russians or Chinese Reds. Some observers find significant the recent determined stand of the Reds at Szepingkai, a junction between the S.M.R. and a branch leading to the edge of Outer Mongolia; and they believe that the Russians and the Chinese Reds were using this strategic branch to cut the S.M.R. at Szepingkai, in an attempt to block Chiang Kai-shek's advance northward. It is also suspected that behind a curtain of opaque oriental discretion, Russia has been haggling with Chiang for control of these branches.

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Real liberals early criticized the Potsdam settlement on the ground that it created irredenta problems by handing over purely German territory to the Russian puppet Government of Poland. These charges now receive confirmation in a dispute involving German political parties in Western occupation zones and the Polish Government. Warsaw has protested to the U. S. Government about broadcasts from an American-controlled radio station in Germany. The broadcasts were a series of round-table discussions by representatives of various German anti-Fascist parties which included Socialists, Communists, Christian Democrats, etc. In the discussions, a German Socialist said that Breslau, Oppeln and other parts of Silesia should be returned to a unified Reich, and that this was a "just German demand". Even one Communist urged "Reich unity". The Warsaw radio, in reply, charged that "Germany has started to build an imperialistic policy under the mantle of democracy".

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Reports that Russia has been secretly smuggling gold into France (New York Times, April 10) reinforce other reports that the Communist fifth column in that country is amassing a big campaign fund to win the coming elections. It is now reported that in June, 1945, the Communists made a financial deal with the de Gaulle Government. That Government (in an effort to smoke out hoarders) had ordered the surrender of all paper currency, to be exchanged for new currency. It developed that the Communist Party was one of the biggest of the hoarders, holding about 13 billion francs, largely stolen from banks and other financial institutions during the wild resistance and liberation period. The Government made an agreement with the Communists to redeem the 13 billion old francs with 8 billion new francs, or at the current rate of exchange the equivalent of $67,000,000. This, plus what has been smuggled into France, represents a mammoth war chest for the coming struggle. There is little doubt that the Communists are going to throw everything into the fight to win the elections.

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Notes and Quotes

Congressman Arthur G. Klein (D.), recently elected in a New York City by-election, serves a warning to Congress (April 4) based on his own experiences: "My principal opponent was openly and vigorously backed by the Communists and their party organ, the Communist Daily Worker. It is a tribute to the fundamental Americanism, the decency and the vigilance of the people of my district -- one of the most heavily Jewish populated districts in the United States -- that they rejected this type of leadership. They repudiated communism. . . . But, at the same time that I have heard the thunder on the left, I have seen the lightning on the right, and I say to you in all solemnity, Mr. Speaker, that the danger from one extreme is as great as from the other. . . . You cannot defeat one form of intolerance by adopting another; you cannot beat repression by exercising it yourself; you cannot hope to defeat communism -- which is anti-Christ, anti-Jewish, and anti-all religion -- by saying that this is a land for white Christians only.

"My position, Mr. Speaker, and my warning, is: That the extremists on both sides are sowing the seeds of disruption and disunity in this country. . . . For the real American viewpoint is one which credits the other fellow's right to express a difference of opinion without impugning his patriotism. But, unfortunately, in the extremists' book there is no such allowance. You are either with him or against him. To the zealot on the left every conservative is a reactionary and a Fascist. And to his counterpart on the right every true Progressive is a Communist."

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André Siegfried, the French political writer, has lost none of his acute sense of the psychology of the average French citizen: "It is sufficient to chat with any Frenchman at all, to ascertain that he mistrusts the State and that he complains of delays and senseless complications in the administration. When he has a choice, he prefers to appeal to private enterprise. However, it is these same Frenchmen who vote for all kinds of nationalization with their eyes closed, without wondering for a single minute whether by this act things will go better." (Paris radio, April 7, 1946, 9:30 p.m. EST)

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"Communism is as successful as Fascism in creating fanatics. Barnave said of Rousseau that he had made a great many people mad who would otherwise only have been fools. Marx had the more dangerous power of making people mad who would otherwise have been reasonable and tolerant. . . . It [Communism] has learned from the Jacobins all the Jacobins learned from the Jesuits about party organization under expert leadership and the technique of secret and universal discipline. Michelet remarked that you could say of the Jacobins that they had saved the French Revolution and that they had ruined it. They saved it, for there was a moment when the invaders could not have been checked by other methods, but they ruined it because when those methods were used for the government of France they were fatal to liberty.

"If the Communist version of democracy as the rule of a drilled and omnipotent party were accepted in the West it would mark a terrible decline in our civilization even if that party were a self-contained French or Belgian party relying on itself. But these Communist parties take their orders from Russia, which means that a nation with so brilliant a past as France is to move in the orbit of a State that has no respect for the liberal traditions that have given France her great place in the history of modern Europe. . . . If Westerners took their political principles from the East today they would be copying not a more advanced but a more backward system. That is why it is of such importance that the Left parties with liberal ideas should be strong and successful. The future of Western Europe depends on their power to educate opinion and to show that they can remove injustice and create a more equal and equitable society while preserving human freedom." (Manchester Guardian editorial, March 1)

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